

Message Text

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E.O. 11652/ N/A
TAGS: PINT SP
SUBJECT: VOTING SYSTEM LIKELY TO PRODUCE REPRESENTATIVE LOWER HOUSE

1. TEST RUNS WE HAVE MADE OF VARIOUS HYPOTHETICAL ELECTORAL OUTCOMES FOR THE LOWER HOUSE IN PROVINCES OF VARYING SIZE DEMONSTRATE GRAPHICALLY THE ADVANTAGE WHICH ALMOST INVARIABLY ACCRUES TO THE FIRST-PLACE PARTY IN EACH ELECTORAL DISTRICT UNDER THE D'HONDT SYSTEM. THE MODELS ALSO INDICATE THAT THE SECOND AND, IN SOME CASES, THE THIRD PLACE PARTY ALSO ARE ADVANTAGED ALTHOUGH TO A LESSER EXTENT. ON THE OTHERHAND, SPLINTER PARTIES CAN BE DISADVANTAGED AND SPLINTER GROUPS WILL BE FROZEN OUT WHICH IS WHAT THE SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO DO. THE TESTS INVOLVED THREE DIFFERENT (BUT BROADLY PLAUSIBLE, ACCORDING TO CURRENT EXPECTATIONS) OUTCOMES IN ONE LARGE PROVINCE MADRID, WITH 32 SEATS) AND HYPOTHETICAL BUT REPRESENTATIVE 8- SEAT, 5-SEAT, AND 3-SEAT PROVINCES.

2. IN THE TESTS THE FIRST-PLACE PARTY FAILED IN ONLY ONE CASE (UNDER ONE OUTCOME IN THE SMALLEST, THREE-SEAT PROVINCE) TO OBTAIN A PERCENTAGE OF THE CONTESTED SEATS EQUAL TO OR GREATER THAN ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE VOTE. BY THE SAME STANDARD THE SECOND-PLACE PARTY IN NO CASE LOST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OUT, WHILE THE RESULTS FOR THE THIRD-PLACE PARTY AND/OR THE SECOND-PLACE PARTY OBTAINED NO MORE SEATS THAN THE NEXT PARTY BEHIND.

3. SUCH DISTORTIONS IN REPRESENTATION WERE NATURALLY MORE PRONOUNCED IN THE 3-SEAT PROVINCE, BUT ALSO OCCURRED IN THE 5-AND 8-SEAT PROVINCES. CONSIDERING THAT 28 OF

SPAIN'S 50 PROVINCES (NOT COUNTING CEUTA AND MELILLA) ARE TO HAVE 5 SEATS OR LESS, THERE IS SOME POTENTIAL FOR COMPLAINT DEPENDING ON HOW THE VOTE BREAKS PRECISELY. THIS POTENTIAL IS HEIGHTENED BY THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE FIRST-PLACE PARTY WHICH GENERALLY WILL BENEFIT MOST FROM THE SYSTEM'S WORKINGS, WILL MOST EVERYWHERE BUT THE BASQUE COUNTRY AND CATALUNYA BE THE SAME ONE, THE GOVT-LINKED UCD. THOSE PARTIES WHICH TRADE OFF SECOND AND THIRD PLACES (THE SOCIALISTS AND THE ALIANZA POPULAR) FROM ONE PROVINCE TO ANOTHER COULD DERIVE APPRECIABLY LESS ADVANTAGE, AND THE DIFFERENCE COULD BECOME A POINT OF CONVENTION.

4. WE NEVERTHELESS SEE A HIGH PROBABILITY THAT THE MIX OF LARGE AND SMALL PROVINCES AND THE WORKINGS OF THE D'HONDT SYSTEM WILL MEAN THAT NO PARTY OF MAJOR NATIONAL -- OR EVEN REGIONAL -- ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCE WILL BE SERIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED ACROSS THE BOARD. THEREFORE THE SYSTEM WOULD SERVE THE TWIN PURPOSES FOR WHICH IT WAS CHOSEN: TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE LEGITIMACY OF THE CORTES' LOWER CHAMBER BY ENSURING THAT IT GENERALLY REFLECTS THE MAJOR CURRENTS OF POLITICAL OPINION, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ALSO CONTRIBUTING TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE BY DISCOURAGING A PROLIFERATION OF MINI-PARTIES AND REWARDING STRONGER FINISHERS WITH A PREMIUM OF SEATS, THEREBY FACILITATING (BUT BY NO MEANS GUARANTEEING) THE FORMATION OF A COHERENT, WORKING PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. OTHER FACTORS, THE SIZE OF THE SUAREZ PLURALITY WHICH WILL DETERMINE THE NEED FOR SEEKING COALITION PARTNERS ELSEWHERE, AND THE UNCERTAIN COHERENCE OF HIS OWN ELECTORAL COALITION

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WILL BECOME DETERMINANTS IN PARLIAMENTARY COALITION BUILDING IN THE POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD.

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